



All young children need stimulation and encouragement as they learn to communicate. Providing a language-rich environment is the hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice. Some children who have language delays or disabilities may need additional help.

First

Meet with the family and find out what you need to know.

- How does the child communicate at home?
- What tips can the parents share for encouraging communication in the classroom?
- Is a speech/language therapist working with the child?
- Can this person visit your classroom to work with you and the child?
- Are there problems with articulation (pronouncing words) or language or both?
- Are pictures, symbols or manual signs used?
- Communicate regularly with the people who are involved with the child.

- Discuss expectations and strategies in order to be consistent across settings.

Environment

1. Create an environment that encourages the child to explore. Include a variety of toys and materials, and rotate these periodically.
2. Ensure the environment is set up to require the child to initiate some communication. For example, occasionally put a favorite toy out of reach and require him or her to “ask” for it. Introduce a novel toy and encourage the child to respond to its presence by vocalizing, labelling, or describing it.
3. Incorporate the child’s means of communication into daily routines. If communication boards, pictures, or devices are used, be sure the necessary classroom objects, people and routines are represented. For example, draw pictures to represent the various songs sung during circle. Let the child choose a song by pointing to the pictures and trying to name the song. If signing is used, use it along with speech throughout the day with all children.
4. Respond enthusiastically to the child’s communication attempts so that you establish a climate of successful communication. Help him or her to feel good about communicating in order to keep trying.

Teaching Strategies

Self talk

Talk about what you are doing. Describe what you see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. (“I am opening the door.” “I hear a bird outside the window.”)

Parallel talk

Describe what the child is doing, feeling, hearing. (“You’re jumping off the step.” “You are crying. You must be sad.”)

Imitation

Imitate the child’s actions, vocalizations, and words.

Naming

Label things in the child’s environment—objects (“doggie, ball”), actions (“go, walk”), locations (“on, under”), descriptions (“big, pretty”), etc.

Including Children with Special Communication Needs

Modeling

Say words correctly for the child. (Child: "bu," Teacher: "bubble"). Say sentences in a more grammatically correct form for the child (Child: "He throw ball," Teacher: "He throws the ball.") Say words and phrases you think the child might want to say to you or others ("I want one" "Let's trade").

Expansion

Listen to what the child says and expand on it. (Child: "ball," Teacher: "big ball"; Child: "more cookie," Teacher: "I want more cookies.")

Asking questions

Ask simple questions with younger children: "What is it?" and more difficult questions with older children: "Why did the boy fall down?"

Prompting for a higher level of communication

Respond to the child's communication with gestures, models, hints, and directives to elicit a desired response or to elicit a higher level of communication. (A child who can talk reaches for juice and grunts. Teacher asks, "What do you want?" The child doesn't say anything. The teacher says "Say 'juice', please.")

Prompting for more appropriate communicative behavior

Attempt to identify the communicative intent of a child's undesirable behavior (e.g., hitting, screaming, or grabbing), and prompt the use of words or gestures to attain the goal in a socially acceptable manner. (After eating lunch, the child kicks the table. The teacher asks, "Are you done?" The child says, "Yes." The teacher says, "Tell me, 'All done, down please'.")

Prompting for communication with peers

Prompt the child to communicate directly with a peer about a problem instead of complaining to a teacher. (Child says, "He took my truck." Teacher responds, "Tell him, 'That's my truck.'") Teacher may direct a child to find out a peer's needs rather than presume them. (An older child starts to take off a younger child's jacket. The teacher says, "Ask her first if she wants help.")

Interacting

1. Be patient, don't interrupt or finish the child's sentences.
2. Pay attention when the child is speaking. Act interested and enthusiastic.
3. Model appropriate rate and rhythm. Rather than saying "slow down" or "think about what you are saying," try responding to the child in a slow, deliberate, but meaningful way. Giving constant directions about how to speak may be frustrating and make the child think his or her speech is never good enough.
4. Help other children learn to use communication boards, pictures or manual signs.
5. Create reasons for the child to communicate, such as
 - "forgetting" something necessary (e.g., a spoon at snack time)
 - doing something surprising (e.g., brushing teeth with an oversized toothbrush)
 - "sabotaging" activities (e.g., putting lid to bubble jar on too tight so that child must ask for help).
6. Talk, talk, talk! Remember that a child is learning language even when he or she is not speaking. ■

Note: From *Mainstreaming Young Children: A Training Series for Child Care Providers* (pp. 90-91), by P.W. Wesley, 1992, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. Copyright 1992 by Patricia W. Wesley. Adapted with permission.